

Unit Four

Grammar

Grammar

Key Issues to Remember

1. **Grammar** means different things to different people and both students and teachers are likely to have **strong opinions** on the concept of teaching grammar in the classroom.
2. Some teachers feel that grammar should be **prescriptive**; they feel that grammar is meant to provide a comprehensive set of rules that govern a language and that the users of a language ought to follow. Linguists however, believe that grammar is meant to be **descriptive**; they feel that grammar should simply describe the reality of how language is used and not attempt to control how people choose to use the language.
3. **Student expectation** is a significant issue in considering whether or not to explicitly teach grammar. Even though teachers may be against it for pedagogical reasons, they need to remember that **students learn more if they optimistic and positive about the learning process**. If students expect a grammar component to a lesson, there is a strong argument to say that it should be provided.
4. There are basically two theories on how to work with grammar in the classroom. One is that teachers should **explicitly teach** grammar to their students; they should talk about nouns and adjectives and verb conjugations with their students. The second theory is that students should be allowed to **implicitly learn** grammar without direct instruction from the teacher; this theory is based on how people learn to use their first language.
5. When teachers do choose to explicitly teach grammar, they have a couple of choices as to how to go about it. Some teachers like to teach grammar **inductively**; this means that they provide students with many grammatical examples first and allow them to work out the rules on their own. Other teachers prefer a **deductive** method where they explicitly state the grammar rules before anything else.
6. Grammar is only boring for students if teachers think it is boring. The **attitude of the teacher** is very important in determining the success of an in-class activity. Teachers who choose to work with grammar in the class need to do so with a positive and confident attitude.
7. Understanding grammar rules and **producing accurate forms in speech** and writing are very different things. When working on a grammar point, the majority of class time should be spent on activities that allow students to **produce language** of their own
8. There are **a lot of resources** available for teachers who choose to work with grammar in their classes. These include entire books full of interesting and

entertaining grammar games and activities. ESL teachers should not only know the grammar well enough to explain it to their students, but they should also know a variety of techniques for making it interesting.

Grammar: Activities and Approaches in the Classroom

1. A deductive approach to grammar teaching provides grammar rules before anything else.

Many students and teachers are more comfortable with a rules-based approach to grammar and, though some teachers would argue against this approach, it is likely to continue to be used extensively in the classroom. If you are considering teaching grammar in this way, here is an example of how it would work with an introduction to the present perfect tense.

The teacher provides a handout (see **handout #1** of this unit) which shows the 12 tense and aspect distinctions of the English verb system. Students should be given time to analyze the handout and discuss it briefly.

A. Explain the form of the present perfect as follows.

Form of Present Perfect = Have/Has + Past Participle

B. Explain the following three meanings of the present perfect

- a. Action starts in past and continues to the present
- b. Action repeated in the past
- c. Action at indefinite past time

C. Give one example sentence to correspond to each of the above meanings

- a. I have been here for 30 minutes.
- b. I have been to England 3 times.
- c. I have been to Italy.

E. Allow trainees to produce some example sentences of their own, both orally and in writing, until you are satisfied they understand the concept.

2. The inductive approach to grammar teaching provides the examples first and allows the students to work out the rules on their own.

This is basically the reverse of the deductive approach as it encourages the students to attempt to induce the rules based on a series of examples provided by the teacher. Some researches feel this approach is stronger as it helps to engage students more in the learning process and make them active learners. Here is an example of how it might work with adjective clauses.

This teaching should begin by the instructor putting the following sentences onto the board.

- 1a. I thanked the man. He gave me money.
- 1b. The car is mine. It is parked across the street.
- 1c. The movie was good. It was playing at Millennium II.

- 2a. The book was good. I read it.
- 2b. The city was beautiful. I visited it last year.
- 2c. Her daughter is cute. I saw her in the park.

The teacher should then ask some of the following questions orally and allow the class time for discussion in small groups or pairs.

1. How can you combine each pair of sentences?
2. What word(s) must be inserted to combine them?
3. Which groups have several possible ways of being combined?
What are they?
4. What is the difference between series 1 and series 2?

Finally, the trainer should ask the class to work in pairs or small groups and write down any rules that they can induce from the examples that they have been working with. Some possible rules they come up with are written below but those rules not induced by the students should be provided by the teacher.

1. relative pronouns = who, that, which
2. who = people, which = things, that = both
3. subject/object pronouns are different
4. object relative pronouns can be dropped

3. Language games are fun but they are also excellent for practicing and reviewing structure.

Language teachers often make the mistake of assuming that games should only be used to make class entertaining on a Friday afternoon. However, many language games can provide excellent structure practice and can become an integral part of the language classroom. Games can also be useful because they encourage students to stop thinking about the language itself; when students focus on the game they worry less about how they are using the language. This lowers anxiety and helps them learn more freely. Look at the common game of Tic-Tac-Toe as an example. Here is how it works.

Divide your class into two groups and label each group as either X or O. With large classes you can have pairs of students copy the Tic-Tac-Toe board onto their own board and compete against one another.

Tic-Tac-Toe Board

Present Perfect	Past Perfect	Simple Past
Simple Future	Simple Present	Past Continuous
Future Perfect	Present Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Continuous

Have students from each group come to the board to make their mark (either an X or an O) wherever the team prefers. In order to be given the X or O, the student must then write an accurate sentence on the board using the verb tense and aspect indicated.

Continue with the activity until one team wins by forming three X's or three O's in a row or a draw is declared.

The competitive nature of this game attracts the students' attention and makes it entertaining but it also serves to review verb tenses and helps the students interact with one another and work as a team.

With a little creativity and effort, teachers can adapt many games and activities for classroom use and they can become valuable to the in-class learning process.

4. Grammar is speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Students should be given the chance to practice and produce language that is structurally accurate but teachers should not forget the value of allowing students to discover structure on their own in reading and listening. Learning to use a language takes a long time and it takes repeated exposure to structure and vocabulary as well as opportunities to practice.

Teachers ought to be able to make effective use of all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) when they work with their students on grammar.

Analysis of recorded dialogues is a good example. After students listen to a conversation on a tape, ask them to find specific examples of a grammar point you have recently covered. Ask them why the speaker chose this particular form at this

time and not another. Here is an example taken from a conversation between two men.

Jeff: Alex, a beautiful young woman has just moved in across the street from my house!

Alex: Really? When are you going to introduce me?

This dialogue may be part of a longer exchange, but the instructor could take advantage of the opportunity to ask students about the adjective word order and the reason for putting *beautiful* before *young* when describing the woman.

This is just one example to illustrate the point that grammar is everywhere all the time and teachers should take a multi-skills approach to structure of the language.

Handouts for Class

English Verb Conjugations

Aspect Tense	Simple	Progressive (Continuous)	Perfect	Perfect Progressive
Past	Walked <i>Ate</i>	Was Walking <i>Was Eating</i>	Had Walked <i>Had Eaten</i>	Had Been Walking <i>Had Been Eating</i>
Present	Walk(s) <i>Eat(S)</i>	Is Walking <i>Is Eating</i>	Have/Has Walked <i>Have/Has Eaten</i>	Have/Has Been Walking <i>Have/Has Been Eating</i>
Future	Will Walk <i>Will Eat</i>	Will Be Walking <i>Will Be Eating</i>	Will Have Walked <i>Will Have Eaten</i>	Will Have Been Walking <i>Will Have Been Eating</i>

Survey for grammar study

Instructions: Complete the following survey by putting a check (✓) in the appropriate box to express your opinion about each item.

	Topics	Very True	True	Maybe true	Mostly False	False
1	The study of grammar is necessary for learning to use a language.					
2	We learned to speak our first language fluently without studying grammar; therefore there is no reason to studying grammar when we learn a second language.					
3	Grammar is better learned by students working on their own at home than in the classroom.					
4	Before students try to produce language, they should study grammar rules.					
5	Language teachers should focus on grammar teaching because it is the most important thing they can do in class.					
6	Students learn more about grammar if they compare grammar of their native language to the grammar of a second language.					
7	When teaching grammar, teachers should give a lot of examples first, and then explain the rules.					
8	The best way to learn grammar quickly is by reading a lot.					
9	Students learn grammar better if their teachers correct all the grammar mistakes.					
10	When talking about grammar, there should always be right and wrong answers.					

Further Resources

1. CCTC2

<http://cctc2.commnet.edu/grammar/index2.htm>

This is an excellent and comprehensive reference site with explanations of over 400 grammar points as well as guides to better writing and links to other sites.

2. Web Concordancer

<http://www.edict.com.hk/concordance/>

A concordancer allows you to enter a word or series of words and have a text or group of texts searched for matches. At this site you can enter any word or phrase you like and have an instant search done on texts as diverse as “Agatha Christie’s Works” and “The Star Report.” This is great help for learning about how words are usually combined in English.

3. Ohio University

<http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/english/grammar/reference.html>

The best meta-site (list of links to other sites) available on grammar issues.

For Students

4. All Irregular Verbs

<http://www.lingolex.com/simplepast/allverbs.htm>

Here students can find a complete list of all irregular verbs, their conjugations, and their Spanish translations.

5. BBC Skillswise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/grammar/>

The BBC provides several entertaining and interactive activities for studying and reviewing grammar.

6. English on the Run

<http://www.geocities.com/gob72/grammarverbtenses.html>

This is a fun site which covers verb tenses in English.

7. A4ESL

<http://a4esl.org/q/h/grammar.html>

This is an excellent site where students can find lots of grammar quizzes and activities on a wide range of grammar topics.

8. University of Victoria

<http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/>

This site provides everything students need to know when preparing to write an essay and it includes comprehensive explanations of grammar issues.